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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000487

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DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS  
NSC FOR DORMANDY

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: KILLINGS IN THE NORTH AND EAST  
HIGHLIGHT CIVILIAN, MILITARY, AND LTTE TENSIONS

REF: COLOMBO 458

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey J. Lunstead. 1.4 (b,d)

1. (C) Summary: Separate deadly incidents in the north and east March 4-6 highlight continuing tensions between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Sri Lanka Army (SLA) in the northern Jaffna peninsula and the LTTE's fractured control of areas in the east. Security forces fired on civilians in Jaffna rioting when a Tamil schoolgirl was killed in a road accident with the SLA. Nine were left dead after factional fighting between the LTTE and Karuna supporters in the east. For the LTTE, the pressure to resume control in the east has likely intensified in the wake of the tsunami in the battle to control the reconstruction and

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rehabilitation resources flowing into the area. End Summary.

Jaffna killing, protests, and more violence  
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2. (C) On March 4, a Sri Lankan military vehicle hit a local high school girl in Jaffna town. The victim died of her injuries as the military was preparing to airlift her to Colombo for medical treatment. Local police immediately arrested the military driver, but the death sparked civilian -- largely student-led -- protests against the military, whose mainly Sinhalese servicemen and women work constantly to sustain a civil relationship with the largely Tamil population in the north. Demonstrators threw stones, attacked an SLA checkpoint and bunkers, and set fire to an SLA vehicle, as well as a local Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) office. After unsuccessful efforts with tear gas and baton charges by the police and military to quell the demonstrators, the March 4 protest ended when the SLA fired on the civilians, injuring two people. Some media reports allege the military's shooting also caused the death of an elderly Tamil man, but Brigadier Daya Ratnayake, Sri Lanka Military spokesman, told poloff that the Tamil man was shot several kilometers from the protest site. The Human Right Commission in Jaffna disputes the SLA's version of events, instead telling POL FSN that the deceased was a bystander at the protests and a victim of military gunfire.

3. (C) On the pro-LTTE website, "TamilNet," the LTTE denied SLA accusations that the group instigated the riots. In a conversation with POL FSN, the Jaffna Government Agent also blamed the civilians for the protests, saying, "people should know to behave themselves." Helen Olafs-Dottir, spokeswoman for the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM), told poloff that in a March 5 meeting with the SLA, police, and LTTE, army officials emphasized that SLA personnel in Colombo -- not Jaffna -- had made the charge of LTTE involvement in the protests. She added that the March 5 meeting was productive, both sides planned to meet again on March 8, and that the situation in Jaffna was now largely calm. Brigadier Ratnayake echoed Olafs-Dottir's comments about the swift return to calm in Jaffna.

Eastern struggle for control continues  
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4. (C) Violence flared in the east on March 5-6 as LTTE cadres and members of the Karuna group -- supporters of the eastern LTTE leader who broke from the group in March 2004 -- clashed, resulting in several deaths over the two days.

-- On March 5, a suspected Karuna cadre was shot and killed in Vantharamoolai, approximately 10 kms south of Batticaloa town, during an exchange of gunfire with the shooter, who was flown to Colombo for medical treatment. Contacts in Batticaloa say there is confusion as to whether the assailant is a member of the LTTE or from a "rival faction" within the Karuna group.

-- On Saturday, March 5, an LTTE cadre was killed in LTTE-controlled area in Kirumichchai, in the Batticaloa district. The LTTE alleges that its member was killed in an "SLA ambush," according to TamilNet. Contacts told POL FSN that a man in a SLA uniform was seen in the area at the time, but Ratnayake denied any involvement to poloff.

-- Later on March 5, four Muslims, a Tamil (a former SLA informant), and a Sinhalese were shot and killed in Welikanda, on the border between Polonnaruwa and Batticaloa districts, in three related incidents. Three others were injured in the shootings. While the LTTE blamed the Karuna group for the killings, local interlocutors point to the LTTE as the actual perpetrators. An interlocutor with an indigenous human rights organization in Batticaloa told POL FSN that it was widely presumed that the six victims provided shelter to those who had killed Kausalyan, the LTTE eastern political leader shot dead on February 7 (RefTel).

-- In the evening of March 6, a member of the People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), an anti-LTTE Tamil organization, was shot and killed also in Batticaloa district. His assailants also remain unknown, although the LTTE remains a likely suspect given the organization's past history of murdering its Tamil opponents.

15. (C) Ratnayake emphasized that fighting in the east was between the LTTE and Karuna supporters, and that the SLA was not involved. He theorized that the uptick in frequency of attacks in recent days could be members of the Karuna group "celebrating" the one-year anniversary of the eastern rebel leader's split with the Tigers. He underscored further that the incidents in the north and in the east were fundamentally different, expressing more concern about the situation in the east. The shootings are occurring in both government- and LTTE-controlled areas, he noted.

16. (C) SLMM spokeswoman Olafs-Dottir also made the same point -- that the perpetrators were slipping back and forth across lines of control in the east with apparent ease. Security in the area is non-existent, she said. The police are incapable of enforcing the law, whether they are scared or do not have the capacity to do investigations. Such limitations hamper the SLMM in ruling an incident as a "ceasefire violation," since the SLMM is dependent on the police to carry out investigations. Citing only one arrest out of 60 incidents in the east in 2004, Olafs-Dottir stated it is critical that the police bring someone to justice for these recent killings.

17. (C) While the situation in the east was troubling and approaching a critical point, Olafs-Dottir made clear that she did not think the ceasefire agreement was in danger. She said the situation on the ground in the east is "not so tense." The SLMM's major concern at the moment is that certain populations, especially the Muslims, would call for some sort of demonstration or strikes in the wake of the killings. She added that all the fingerpointing, public statements and rumors -- by all parties -- also had a negative impact on the atmosphere in the east.

Comment  
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18. (C) With a culturally diverse population -- nearly equal proportions of Tamils, Muslims, and Sinhalese -- the climate in the east is unfortunately ideal for tensions to rise. The power struggle between the LTTE and Karuna supporters is another element that only aggravates overall instability in the area. The police, who largely took a subordinate role to the Sri Lanka military during the decades of conflict, are now finding, with the military's powers curtailed by the ceasefire and suspension of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, they are not sufficiently trained or motivated to address the law enforcement challenge. In the wake of the tsunami, with huge quantities of resources flowing into the area, there is even greater pressure for the LTTE to regain its control in the east. As the weekend's violence shows, the LTTE will not give up this quest, but they are far from winning it. End Comment.

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